

weeks after being diagnosed with colon cancer. At the time he was diagnosed, he had been laid off from his job and could not afford COBRA coverage. This is what his brother said:

When he was in enough pain to see a doctor it was too late. He left a wife and two teenage sons in the prime of his life at 50 years old. The attending physician said that, if he had only sought treatment earlier, he would still be alive.

Horribly, tragically, that same story is being told in every State in this country over and over again. If only he had gone to the doctor in time he could have lived, but he didn't have any health insurance. That should not be taking place in the United States of America in the year 2009.

Our health care disaster extends beyond even the thousands who die needlessly every single year. Many others suffer unnecessary disability—strokes that leave them paralyzed because they couldn't afford treatment for their high blood pressure, or amputations, blindness, or kidney failure from untreated diabetes. Infants are born disabled because their mothers couldn't get the kind of prenatal care that every mother should have, and millions with mental illness go without care every single day.

In a town in northern Vermont not far from where I live, a physician told me that one-third of the patients she treats are unable to pay for the prescription drugs she prescribes. Think about the insanity of that. We ask doctors to diagnose our illness, to help us out, she writes the prescription for the drug, and one-third of her patients cannot afford to fill that prescription. That is insane. That is a crumbling health care system. The reason people cannot afford to fill their prescription drugs is that our people, because of pharmaceutical industry greed, are forced to pay by far the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. This is indefensible. There is nobody who can come to the floor of this Senate and tell me that makes one shred of sense.

The disintegration of our health care system causes not only unnecessary human pain, suffering, and death, but it is also an economic disaster. Talk to small businesses in Vermont, New Hampshire, any place in this country, and they tell you they cannot afford to invest in their companies and create new jobs because all of their profits are going to soaring health care costs—10, 15, 20 percent a year. Talk to the recently bankrupt General Motors and they will tell you that they spend more money per automobile on health care than they do on steel. GM is forced to pay \$1,500 per car on health care while Mercedes in Germany spends \$419, and Toyota in Japan spends \$97. Try to compete against that.

From an individual economic perspective, it is literally beyond comprehension that of the nearly 1 million people who will file for bankruptcy this year, the vast majority are filing for

bankruptcy because of medically related illnesses. Let's take a deep breath and think about this from an emotional point of view. Let's think about the millions of people who are today struggling with cancer, struggling with heart disease, struggling with diabetes or other chronic illnesses. They are not even able to focus on their disease and trying to get well. They are summoning half their energy to fight with the insurance companies to make sure they get the coverage they need. That is not civilized. That is not worthy of the United States of America.

In my State of Vermont—and I suspect it is similar in New Hampshire and every other State—I have many times walked into small mom-and-pop stores and seen those little donation jars that say: Help out this or that family because the breadwinner is struggling with cancer and does not have any health insurance or little Sally needs some kind of operation and she doesn't have any health insurance, put in a buck or five bucks to help that family get the health care they need. This is the United States of America. This should and cannot be allowed to continue.

One of the unfortunate things that has occurred during the entire health care debate is that we have largely ignored what is happening in terms of health care around the rest of the world. I have heard some of my Republican colleagues get up and say: We have the best health care system in the world. Yes, we do, if you are a millionaire or a billionaire, but we do not if you are in the middle class, not if you are a working-class person, certainly not if you are low income. It is just not true.

Today, the United States spends almost twice as much per person on health care as any other country. Despite that, we have 46 million uninsured and many more underinsured and our health care outcomes are, in many respects—not all but in many respects—worse than other countries. Other countries, for example, have longer life expectancies than we do. They are better on infant mortality, and they do a lot better job in terms of preventable deaths. At the very beginning of this debate, we should have asked a very simple question: Why is it we are spending almost twice as much per person on health care as any other country with outcomes that, in many respects, are not as good?

According to an OECD report in 2007, the United States spent \$7,290, over \$7,000 per person on health care. Canada spent \$3,895, almost half what we spent. France spent \$3,601, less than half what we spent. The United Kingdom spent less than \$3,000, and Italy spent \$2,600 compared to the more than \$7,000 we spent. Don't you think that maybe the first question we might have asked is: Why is it we spend so much and yet our health care outcomes, in many respects, are worse than other countries? Why is it that that happens?

Let me tell you what other people will not tell you. One key issue that needed to be debated in this health care discussion has not been discussed. The simple reason as to why we spend so much more than any other country with outcomes that are not as good as many other countries is that this legislation, from the very beginning, started with the assumption that we need to maintain the private for-profit health insurance companies. That basic reality that we cannot touch private insurance companies, in fact that we have to dump millions more people into private health insurance companies, that was an issue that could not even be discussed. And as a result, despite all the money we spend, we get poor value for our investment.

According to the World Health Organization, the United States ranks 37th in terms of health system performance compared with five other countries: Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The U.S. health system ranks less or less than half.

Sometimes these groups poll people. They go around the world and they poll people and they ask: How do you feel about your own health care system? We end up way down below other countries. Recently, while the Canadian health care system was being attacked every single day, they did a poll in Canada. They said to the Canadian people: What do you think about your health care system? People in America say you have a terrible system. Do you want to junk your system and adopt the American system? By overwhelming numbers, the people of Canada said: Thank you, no thank you. We know the American system. We will stay with our system.

I was in the United Kingdom a couple months ago. I had an interesting experience. It was a Parliamentarian meeting. I met with a number of people in the Conservative Party—not the liberal Democratic Party, not the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, the party which likely will become the government of that country. The Conservatives were outraged by the kind of attacks being leveled against the national health system in their country, the lies we are being told about their system. In fact, the leader of the Conservative Party got up to defend the national health system in the United Kingdom and said: If we come to power, we will defend the national health system. Those were the conservatives.

What is the problem with our system which makes it radically different than systems in any other industrialized country? It is that we have allowed for-profit private corporations to develop and run our health care system, and the system that these companies have developed is the most costly, wasteful, complicated, and bureaucratic in the entire world. Everybody knows that. With 1,300 private insurance companies and thousands and thousands of different health benefit programs all designed to maximize profits, private